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A Boy's Recollection of the War

BY
W. O. HART

Reprinted from Publications of the Mississippi
Historical Society—Vol. XII.



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A BOY'S RECOLLECTION OF THE WAR.

BY W. O. HART.¹

In 1861, when the war broke out, I was almost four years of age, and, therefore, nearly eight years of age when the war ended, but I have a very vivid recollection of many incidents happening in the meantime, including many in the State of Mississippi.

My father, Toby Hart, enlisted in the early part of the war and was sent for service to the forts below the city of New Orleans. But having been an employer of large numbers of men, he chafed under the restraint of being in a subordinate position. Sometime thereafter, he obtained a leave of absence to return to the city, where he organized a company, of which he became captain. It was known afterwards as "Company E, Eighth Louisiana Battalion of Heavy Artillery." I remember distinctly when he came home and stated that he was going to organize a company, but I have no recollection of when he left the city.

My mother and I left, on what I was told, was the last train that went out of the city over what was then known as the Jackson railroad, now a part of the Illinois Central. This train left after General Butler had entered the city. The only other circumstance I remember in connection with this event, was that

¹William Octave Hart, born in New Orleans, August 19, 1857. He is the only child of Toby Hart and Anna Hussey. Mrs. Hart, his wife, was a native of New Orleans, and her parents natives of Ireland, where the family lived for many years.

Toby Hart was the eldest son of William R. Hart. He was born at Newberry, South Carolina, August 29, 1835, and died on December 27, 1907. William R. Hart was born in New York city in 1810, and was the eldest son of William Hart, a native of England, who served in the Revolutionary War on the British side, but after the war remained in New York city and became an American citizen. The mother of Toby Hart was Miss Harriet Carter, of Washington city, who died in New Orleans at the age of twenty-eight.—EDITOR.

I heard it said that Butler had stated he intended to hang Mumford for tearing down the United States flag from the Mint, where it had been placed by order of Admiral Farragut. I do not remember anything about the arrival of the Federal fleet, nor do I remember anything about Mumford's tearing down the flag, until I heard of the threat made by General Butler.

The train we were on stopped at Camp Moore, where my father was temporarily stationed, and at different times we stayed at Brookhaven, Jackson and Meridian. At the first named place, I remember receiving from some one, the first toy books I ever saw, being the story of Mother Hubbard and the story of Cock Robin, and I kept them and prized them until, from being so frequently used and shown to my little friends, they were worn out.

Meridian, as I remember it at that time, was a place with a few log cabins, in one of which we lived for a few days. I think it was at Jackson, that I saw men riding by in wagons, whom I was told were deserters being taken out somewhere to be shot. I also recall some very doleful music that was played as they went along, part of which, I think, I heard at one of the performances of the Clansman in New Orleans, a few years ago. We finally reached Enterprise, Mississippi, where, with other officers' families, we were located in an abandoned schoolhouse. This building was so large that tents were put in it for sleeping quarters.

My father was there with his command, and there were a great many other soldiers. It was here that I saw baseball played for the first time. My father, who had been an active amateur baseball player in New Orleans organized two teams, which played in the large grounds near the schoolhouse. I think it was while there that we made a trip to Cooper's Wells, where one day was spent in enjoyment. But, suddenly, I was told that an order had come for everybody to go to Vicksburg. Just before starting, there was a grand ball given in the schoolhouse, and I was allowed to stay up and see the dancing and wait for supper. I remember distinctly the privates and others looking through the windows and other openings at the officers and ladies at the supper table. Finally, when these had finished, the others

were allowed to come in, and there was plenty for all. As in the case of the great ball at Waterloo, the night before the great battle, "There was a sound of revelry by night," and everybody was gay and happy because the sound of war had not yet reached that place. There was plenty of music, and the leader of one of the bands, after the war, settled in Gainesville, Alabama, where we then lived, as I will state further on. A member of the band was a Mr. Sinclair, whom my father had known in New Orleans before the war, and whom I saw after the surrender in New Orleans, as a member of a stock company which was playing in the old St. Charles Theatre. Among the members of my father's command was Mr. H. N. Ogden, who was second lieutenant, I think. He afterwards became attorney general of Louisiana.

At Vicksburg, my mother and I occupied a tent on one of the hills, and I remember that we often saw the shells explode, though we were too far away to be in danger. My father's command planted the first gun at Vicksburg, at a point now marked by an iron tablet, erected by the United States government. This place is below the city and near one of the railroad freight depots.

In 1909, just before the Confederate Reunion at Memphis, I visited Vicksburg, to arrange for the visit of Camp Beauregard, No. 130, United Sons of Confederate Veterans of New Orleans, of which I was then commandant, to attend the exercises held in connection with the unveiling of the monument to General Stephen D. Lee. As Captain W. T. Rigby, superintendent of the military park, drove me through the park, I noticed that though Mississippi, and other States, had small monuments or markers placed where their commands had been located during the Vicksburg campaign, Louisiana had none. I thereupon suggested to Captain Rigby that if the war department had no objection, I would erect a small monument to my father's command. Permission was subsequently given, and the monument was erected and put in place by the superintendent. This was the first monument erected in the park by a private individual. Subsequently, through the efforts of Captain Rigby and Captain Lewis Guion, of New Orleans, who succeeded General Lee on

the commission, and Col. A. L. Slack, of Tallulah, Louisiana, who had been in the Vicksburg campaign, all the Louisiana commands which took part in the campaign are now commemorated by small monuments given by individuals, or built from a fund subscribed by private parties and by appropriations of the city of New Orleans and the police juries of Louisiana.

My father was suddenly ordered away from Vicksburg to Selma, on some special service, and, therefore, did not surrender to Grant. We traveled very slowly across the country in an ox wagon, and it took us several weeks to get to our destination. I remember that we passed through one abandoned town, I think it was either Mount Carmel or Monticello, where there was not a person living, and the only living things we saw in the place were some goats. The men had gone to the war and the women and children were elsewhere. We had go trouble getting food and shelter at the farmhouses along the way until we finally reached Selma. With us were an elderly lady and gentleman, whose names I do not recall.

At Selma I passed my sixth birthday. There I heard for the first time of Fenner's battery, but I afterwards heard it spoken of so many times that I thought everybody knew of it. In Selma my father was taken sick, and was relieved from active service for a short time and sent to Demopolis as provost marshal. For a time we stayed with a Mrs. Lattimore, whom I well remember calling "Mrs. Latticeworks." But my being ordered to the front, we separated and I did not see him again until the next year. From Demopolis my mother and I went to Mobile. I do not recall where we took the train, but I remember that we slept on iron rails during the trip. At Mobile we embarked for Montgomery on a steamer, which I was told was loaded with gunpowder. I remember distinctly that the doors of the state-rooms were left open to facilitate the escape of the passengers, should anything happen. At Montgomery I saw snow for the first time.

Next, we went to Cahaba, Alabama, which was then a flourishing place, and I was told that it had been the capital of Alabama, but I believe is now totally abandoned. We then went to Gainesville, Alabama, arriving there, as near as I can recall, in the

winter of 1863. We remained there until just after the presidential election of 1868, when we returned to New Orleans, permanently to reside. Several times my father came over for a day or two. He surrendered at Meridian and soon thereafter came home to Gainesville. I have no recollection of hearing anything said about the fall of Vicksburg, nor of the surrender of General Lee, nor of the assassination of President Lincoln, but I remember hearing people talk of the fall of Port Hudson, which occurred soon after the fall of Vicksburg, either while I was at Demopolis or Gainesville. While living in Gainesville, when it was expected that Mobile was about to fall, there was established in our house a printing office, where a newspaper was published by the owners of some paper in Mobile. After the supply of paper they had brought with them was exhausted, and the small amount that was in the town had been used, they began to publish their newspaper on wall paper and kept it up until the end of the war. The poem by George McKnight, who wrote under the *nom de plume* of "Asa Hartz," beginning,

"My love reposes on a rosewood frame,
A bunk have I":

was published in one of these wall-paper editions.

Gainesville before the war, and during the war, was a flourishing town, and a great shipping point. The boat trade on the Tombigbee river to Mobile on the south, and Columbus on the north, was very large, and I saw many boats on its waters during the war, but I can recall the names of only two of them—the "Admiral" and the "Jefferson Davis." There were many large stores there, and a short railroad connected the town with the Mobile and Ohio Railroad at a place called Gainesville Junction; but this track has since been torn up, the river trade has disappeared, and the glories of Gainesville are no more. The place was frequently visited by large bodies of Confederate troops, and many times prisoners were brought in to be taken to other points for exchange or confinement.

At one time there occurred what was called by the people, "Grayson's Raid," though the name of the leader of the raid was General Grierson. I think he was from Missouri, and have read

that he died recently. I remember the cloud of dust as the cavalry came into the little town. They did not stay very long, because, I suppose, they were afraid of the Confederate troops which were in the neighborhood. They burned the telegraph office, tore up part of the railroad tracks, and carried off all the horses they could find. As far as I can remember, no damage was done to private property. But I recall that several times afterwards, when it was reported that the raiders were coming back, we buried all our silverware in the yard, as many other families did.

For many years prior to his death, about twelve years ago, there lived in New Orleans a lawyer, Judge Heidenhain by name, who had served in the Union army. I became very intimate with him, and on my telling him some of my war experiences in conversation one day, I found that he had been one of the raiders. A great many Confederate soldiers surrendered at Gaiensville at the end of the war, and some of them are now living in New Orleans. Among them is the venerable Confederate chaplain, Rev. A. Gordon Bakewell, who was also, as he told me some days ago, on the same train on which my mother and I left the city. A large Federal garrison was established in Gainesville after the war, and remained there for many months. It was not long after the surrender before United States money again became current in the little town. A good many of the stores, particularly the large store of Russell & Dunlap, which I well remember on Main street, had a large stock of goods, and the sale of this stock and of the country produce to the soldiers kept the town moving. In addition to that, Col. R. G. McMahon, proprietor of the American Hotel, and one of the leading citizens of the State, issued a "shinplaster" currency which circulated freely, and, I believe, every dollar of it was redeemed.

Soon after the war, my father returned to New Orleans to see if he could find anything of what he had left behind; because when my mother and I went out of the house, on Camp near Jackson street, which is still standing, we, like many others, left as if for a visit and took nothing with us except some clothing. But, of course, everything had disappeared. All that he recovered was a few family pictures, one of them of my father, which was

taken just about the time I was born, and of which I am still the happy possessor.

He was absent on the Fourth of July, 1865, and on that day the Federal officers in the town gave a grand dinner, and little boy that I was, they had me there. I feel compelled to say that I was always a great favorite with the soldiers of both armies, and this invitation resulted from that fact. When my father returned, and found out that his only child, on the Fourth of July, of all days, had taken dinner with "Yankee" soldiers, as all called them at that time, I recall that he cried like a baby. But, of course, long before his death, which occurred in December, 1907, he felt, as do all true Southerners, that the Union soldier is entitled to just as much credit for what he did, as the Confederate soldier. Many a time I saw wounded and sick soldiers brought into Gainesville, and I saw enough and heard enough of the horrors of war never to want to see another conflict.

In 1867 my mother and myself returned to New Orleans for a short visit, and, of course, things in a big city were quite a revelation to me, for I had little memory of the city before the war; and I was certainly very glad to return to New Orleans, in 1868, to permanently reside. Since then I have been almost around the world, and I have said many times that I wanted to go back to Gainesville to see the place, but I have never been able to get there, though only a short distance away. My esteemed friend, Mr. W. S. Benedict, an eminent lawyer of New Orleans, who died a few years ago, told me that he was born in Gainesville; so he and I had planned a trip together to the old town; but he died, and I could not get there, and perhaps never will.

While I feel that the foregoing account cannot prove of much interest, it has been a pleasant task for me to write it. I have often intended to do so, and I am glad of the opportunity which now presents itself. What I have stated represents entirely personal recollections. I could add much more if I was to put in my impressions, or what was told to me by others; but, as you will see, I have confined myself entirely to personal recollections, and they may have some value, as representing the part of the war which a little fellow saw.

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